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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1451st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 November 2023

**On the continued violations by some participating States of their OSCE commitments
related to the protection of historical monuments and sites of remembrance**

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite our numerous statements at the Permanent Council and our appeals to the executive structures of the Organization to intervene in what is happening, the outrages against Soviet historical and memorial heritage and sites of remembrance and even the sacrilegious and ignominious digging up of collective burial sites is not only continuing unabated in the OSCE area but is gaining new momentum.

Amendments to the law on the prohibition of the display and on the dismantling of objects glorifying the Soviet and Nazi occupation regimes on the territory of Latvia were submitted to the Latvian Saeima (Parliament) on 26 October this year. As is known, the law itself was adopted in June 2022, and, as a result of its rigorous application, some 120 memorial sites have been destroyed, including a large-scale memorial complex in Riga commemorating soldiers who liberated the country from fascism. Now the lawmakers have gone even further and have proposed the dismantling of all Soviet monuments, including those with collective burial sites underneath.

The date for the first reading of the draft has not yet been set. However, there is no doubt that the Saeima Education, Culture and Science Committee, which is responsible for technical support, will not delay the process and will make every effort to speed up its discussion and approval by the country's Parliament.

In the annotation to the document, the nationalist authors complain that the current version of the law is "inadequate" because it does not allow for the dismantling of objects located at burial sites. They also refer to the Saeima decision of 12 May 2022 to suspend Article 13 of the 1994 Russian-Latvian intergovernmental agreement on social guarantees for military pensioners, which ensured the preservation of Soviet memorials. It is noteworthy that the instigators of the grave excavations chose not to take into account the bilateral agreement of 2007 on the status of war graves, according to which Latvia undertook commitments to protect, take care of and preserve collective war graves and memorials located on its territory. So far, there are plans to dismantle some 70 memorials. However, Latvian lawmakers are unlikely

to stop until they have destroyed all remaining memorial and commemorative sites. Moreover, the Latvian Government is sparing no expense for this shameful activity.

The desecration of the memory of Soviet soldiers is also in full swing in Estonia. On 13 November this year, the Estonian War Museum announced the sacrilegious idea to “rebury” the remains of 18 Soviet soldiers in a military cemetery in Tallinn by the spring of 2024. The formal pretext for this unconscionable move is to “clear a passage” to the monument to the recipients of the Cross of Liberty. The fate of the remains after exhumation remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the actions of the Estonian authorities constitute an act of State vandalism that has no justification and must be condemned by the democratic international community to which this country considers itself to belong.

Mr. Chairperson,

Latvia and Estonia are in flagrant violation of their international obligations, including those pertaining to the protection, care and preservation of burial sites and the memorials located on them. We should like to refer specifically to the 1991 Document of the Cracow Symposium on the Cultural Heritage of the CSCE Participating States, where it is stressed, in paragraph 12, that “the complete and lasting documentation of sites, structures, cultural landscapes, objects and cultural systems, including historical, religious and cultural monuments, as they presently exist, is one of the most important legacies to the cultural heritage that can be provided for future generations.”

In line with their shared policy of exonerating Nazi war criminals and their accomplices, the authorities of these two States are doing their utmost to ensure that the place of true heroes and liberators is taken by those who are justifiably labelled as Nazi accomplices, collaborators and henchmen of Hitler’s Germany. Hence the encouragement at the State level of the annual processions of Waffen-SS veterans and their traditional “gatherings”, and the desire to rewrite the history of the Second World War to fit their own pseudo-historical moulds. Against this background, we are not surprised that Latvia and Estonia voted against the resolution of the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on “Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is absolutely unacceptable when, under far-fetched and completely inappropriate pretexts, there is a real triumph of absurdity and a mockery of historical memory, a return to primitive times, where war is literally waged against the dead and graves are danced upon. We are deeply disappointed by the prolonged absence of a clear reaction to these outrages on the part of the functionaries of our Organization – the Chairmanship, the Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We regard such a position as *de facto* indulgence in these disgraceful acts with neo-fascist overtones. Please consider our statement to be an official appeal, which we will shortly support with letters to the leadership and to the heads of the institutions.

Thank you for your attention.